

October 9, 2001

TO: Washington State Board of Health

FROM: Carl Osaki, Member

RE: Briefing on the Emergency Response Capacity of the Public Health System in Washington State

### **Background**

The September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in New York City and Washington, D.C. have raised questions and concerns about the local, state, and federal emergency response systems in the United States. The ability of the public health system to effectively respond to public health threats and emergencies, in particular, has been examined and found in need of improvement by the U.S. General Accounting Office, by Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Director Dr. Jeffrey Koplan, and by writer Laurie Garrett. (See excerpt from U.S. G.A.O. Report on Bioterrorism, "Building Infrastructure to Protect the Public's Health," and articles by Laurie Garrett, attached.)

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Washington State Department of Health (DOH), the State Emergency Management Division, and other agencies have been working on improving Washington State's emergency response capacity. In the summer of 2000, DOH asked the Northwest Center for Public Health Practice, a program of the University of Washington School of Public Health and Community Medicine, to develop a training module for local public health personnel and their emergency counterparts. (See "Training for Public Health Emergencies," attached.) This briefing will provide the opportunity for the Board to learn about the status of these activities.

This briefing will also assist the Board in identifying policy gaps; providing support and assistance to agencies and organizations involved in preparing for and responding to large scale public health emergencies; and suggesting opportunities for additional linkages to improve coordination of the public health system.

### **Presenters**

Discussions with Board, DOH, Emergency Management Division, and Washington State Hospital Association staff suggested the following presenters, who represent the main components of the state and local public health systems.

Mary Selecky, Board member and DOH Secretary, will describe the organization of state public health systems involved in emergency responses and the primary components of an adequate state response to public health threats. (See “Addressing Public Health Preparedness,” attached.)

Larry Jecha, Washington State Association of Local Public Health Officials member and Health Officer for Benton-Franklin Health District and Klickitat County Health Department, will describe the local health department’s role in emergency responses and the primary components of an adequate local public health response to public health threats.

Jeffrey S. Duchin, Chief, Communicable Disease Control, Public Health – Seattle & King County, will describe early detection and communication methods for biological disaster preparedness. He will also address how individuals, as well as the public health system, should prepare for public health threats and emergencies. (See Testimony by Jeffrey S. Duchin, attached.)

Chris Martin, Administrative Director of Emergency Services at Harborview Medical Center, will describe the Washington State Hospital Association’s policy for emergency responses and hospital’s roles in coordinating medical and public health resources during an emergency.

Mark Oberle, Associate Dean of the UW School of Public Health and Community Medicine (UW SPHCM), will discuss how the UW SPHCM supports state and local public health agencies and organizations.

Attachments: Excerpt from U.S.G.A.O. Report on Bioterrorism, September 2001  
“Building Infrastructure to Protect the Public’s Health,” Dr. Jeffrey P. Koplan,  
“Health Care Workers’ Skills Are Put to Test,” “U.S. Ill-Prepared for  
Bioterrorism,” “Battling Bioterror,” and “GAO: U.S. Not Ready,” Laurie  
Garrett, 2001  
“Training for Public Health Emergencies,” Carl Osaki, 2001  
“Addressing Public Health Preparedness,” Mary Selecky, 2001  
Testimony of Jeffrey S. Duchin, M.D., to the US House of Representatives  
Subcommittee on National Security, Veteran’s Affairs and International  
Relations, Hearing on Combating Terrorism, July 23, 2001  
Washington State Medical Association Resolution on Disaster Response Plan  
and Physician Education, 2001